United Nations

Daily Highlights

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

+ Secretary-General reaffirms commitment for restructuring of Organization; pledges to take all possible measures to strengthen international civil service.

+ Meeting between representatives of Angolan Government and UNITA, scheduled for today in Caxito, delayed; 300 expatriates are evacuated from Luanda, says United Nations official.

+ Committee of Experts on war crimes in former Yugoslavia decides to begin factual analysis of existing reports as well as legal analysis of applicable law, as it concludes first meeting at Headquarters.

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees appeals for $17.8 million for food and shelter to avert winter emergency in Afghanistan.

+ Human Rights Committee expresses "grave concern and anger" over massive violations occurring in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

+ Fighting in Liberia is preventing United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from assisting more than 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees stranded in isolated north of that country.

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United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today pledged to take all possible measures to strengthen the international civil service, saying he would like that to be his "legacy to the Organization". He promised to preserve the independence and integrity of the international civil service and to promote the highest standards of efficiency and competence.

The Secretary-General made the pledge in a statement to the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) this morning, in which he also appealed on behalf of the United Nations to all Member States to meet their financial obligations and pay their contributions in full and on time.

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In a review of his recent proposals for a reorganization of the Secretariat, the Secretary-General said political appointments at the Under-Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General level should "by definition be of a limited duration". As a rule, he said, they should not extend beyond the term of office of the Secretary-General or the head of Programme who made the initial appointment. In addition, he intended to continue decreasing the number of Assistant Secretary-General posts throughout the United Nations. In the initial stage of the restructuring, the number of senior level posts had been reduced, and the decision-making procedures were thus made simpler and more direct.

Turning to the issue of career development, the Secretary-General said a career international civil service should be based on competitive recruitment at the junior professional levels and a transparent career development process in which the majority of posts were filled from within. Rigour in granting and reviewing permanent appointments was an integral part of this concept, he said. A genuinely independent service also required an end to the practice of national subsidies paid to some staff members. That practice was unethical, and raised questions of conflict of interest which could not be ignored.

On the issue of the unprecedented number of peace-keeping operations mounted by the United Nations lately, the Secretary-General noted that 600 professional staff and more than 1000 General Service staff were currently assigned to such missions. That situation could not be sustained over a long-term period without fundamental changes in the present outmoded system of personnel management, he said. Training was crucial to enhance the quality of management in the Secretariat and to provide staff with operational skills needed for field service. The United Nations was currently devoting only 0.27 per cent of its staff costs to training. The Secretary-General proposed a significantly increased allocation of resources to that activity in the next budget.

On the issue of women, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said it was evident that efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat in recent years had not reached anticipated levels. While this situation was not only a matter of equity, the Secretary-General said the world could no longer afford to deprive its public life of the talents of half of all humanity.

In closing, the Secretary-General said his management policy had been, and would continue to be, to delegate. He expected managers to manage and all staff to work creatively, constructively and with a commitment to disciplined achievement. He expressed the hope for a shared sense of participation and responsibility "all up and down the line".

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The meeting scheduled to take place today in Caxito between representatives of the Angolan Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) had been delayed, but would be held shortly, according to a United Nations official today. The delay was due to the fact that negotiating teams had not yet been established.

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola, Margaret Anstee, was continuing efforts to get the two leaders to meet "as soon as practicable", the official said. Three hundred expatriates had been evacuated from Luanda this morning on two South African planes, but there was nothing new with regard to the Russians and Brazilians specialists being held in Capanda.

In a related development, the Bulgarian Ambassador to the United Nations, Slavi Pashovski, has informed the President of the Security Council that a Bulgarian national has accidentially been killed during the recent fighting in Angola.

In a letter, dated 4 November, Mr. Pashovski further said that it had been established that the Bulgarian Chargé d'affaires in Luanda had not been kidnapped, as reported earlier in a letter to the Council President on 2 November. Mr. Pashovski said the premises of the Bulgarian Embassy had suffered serious damages and most of the property, including vehicles, furniture, funds and documentation, had been stolen.

In a previous letter dated 1 November, the Bulgarian Government reported that it was taking urgent measures aimed at rescuing the staff of the Bulgarian Embassy, namely trying to locate the nearest Bulgarian vessel and make arrangements for the evacuation of its nationals from Luanda.

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The Committee of Experts, set up by the Security Council to investigate reports of violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia, has decided to begin a factual analysis of existing reports as well as a legal analysis of applicable law. The Commission made that decision during its first two-day meeting at Headquarters on 4 and 5 November at which it discussed organizational and procedural concerns and began dealing with methodological and substantive issues.

The Commission will meet shortly in Geneva to continue its discussion of practical problems inherent to the identification and eventual investigation of alleged incidents.

In establishing the Commission early October, the Council appealed to States and relevant organizations to make information available to the Commission by today, 6 November, regarding the violation of humanitarian law. The members of the Commission, who were appointed by the Secretary-General on 26 October, are Frits Kalshoven, Chairman; Cherif Bassiouni; William Fenrick; Judge Keba Mbaye; and Torkel Opsahl.

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Adequate food and shelters are urgently needed to avert a winter emergency in Afghanistan, struggling to absorb more than 1 million returnees who are going home this year under a repatriation programme assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

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According to a press release issued by UNHCR today, some $17.8 million were urgently required to meet winter emergency needs over the next two months, as stated by Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Eliasson, last week at a donors conference in New York. The appeal was made in the face of lacking funds for Afghanistan, with only one third of the total $180 million required by all United Nations agencies for voluntary repatriation and immediate assistance in Afghanistan having been pledged.

The press release said that while the UNHCR was responsible for providing shelter inside Afghanistan, the World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were responsible for food and health care. Eighty per cent of Afghans returning from Pakistan to northern Afghanistan say there is a shortage of food for the winter and all five large food silos in the country are already empty.

Under UNHCR's repatriation program, more than 1 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan in 1992, another 200,000 from Iran and some 10,000 to 15,000 continue to repatriate each week. In addition, 135,000 internally displaced Afghans are also in need of urgent assistance.

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Meeting in Geneva on Wednesday, 4 November, members of the Human Rights Committee expressed "grave concern and anger" over the massive violations now occurring in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The "ethnic cleansing" policy, the Committee was told, had already resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people and hundreds of thousands who had to flee for their lives.

Concern was expressed among the members that the next major target would be Kosovo, where the majority Albanian population had been deprived of their basic human rights. Furthermore, the Committee's experts repeatedly stressed the responsibility of the authorities and agents of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) for much of the violence taking place on the other side of the borders. They also noted that, despite the Federal Government's expressed intention, thus far not a single person guilty of human rights violations had been tried.

The Deputy Federal Minister for Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Konstantin Obradovic, declared that his country was aware of its human rights shortcomings. The Federal Government had expressed the political will to re-establish a State of law but did not have sufficient power to bring the violators of human rights to justice.

Speakers noted that the special report by Croatia reflected that country's commitment to the promotion of human rights. Nevertheless, they also stressed that the State was responsible for actions on its territory and of its representatives abroad and that serious steps had to be taken to limit the violence that had plagued the region.

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The latest fighting in the nearly three-year-old civil war in Liberia, which began mid-October, is preventing the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from assisting more than 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, the vast majority of whom are stranded in the isolated north of the country, the UNHCR said today.

Thousands more are trapped in the war-torn capital, Monrovia, but the Agency has managed to repatriate 1800 so far. At least ten more trips would be necessary to evacuate those remaining in Monrovia who wish to go home, the Agency said.

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